



Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

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January 16, 2024

TO: Member of the Tennessee Legislature

Re: Support for House Bill 1610 and Senate Bill 1588

Honorable members of the Tennessee Legislature,

With approximately 80,000 members nationwide, including more than 1,275 in Tennessee, Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals (ABMP) works to ensure our members are equipped with the tools, resources, and knowledge to practice massage therapy competently and legally in 48 licensed, certified, or registered jurisdictions in the country. Public safety is our top priority.

ABMP fully supports [House Bill 1610](#) and [Senate Bill 1588](#), which will increase the required education hours for massage licensure from 500 to 650.

In 2011, ABMP and six other national massage organizations—what came to be called the Coalition of National Massage Therapy Organizations (“Coalition,” for short)—assembled to identify key aspects of massage practice that were candidates for improvement, with entry-level education being identified as the single greatest priority.

ABMP took charge of creating a major project to identify the skills and knowledge that should be included in a core massage education to prepare someone to practice safely and effectively. A companion piece of the project was to assess how many hours this core education should require for a capable instructor to impart this knowledge. The collective result was the Entry-Level Analysis Project (ELAP). The ELAP recommended entry-level curriculum guidelines of 600 to 650 hours.

All seven Coalition members signed on to a December 2013, eight-page summary, the “Statement of Coalition of National Massage Therapy Organizations.” The ELAP subsequently informed revised, entry-level educational requirements in several states and was incorporated in Model Practice Act Guidelines created by the Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards (FSMTB).

Of the 48 states that offer a massage therapy license, certification, or registration, 25 states require a minimum hour requirement of 600 hours or more. Therefore, 50 percent of states that require a massage therapy license mandate their massage students receive more education than their Tennessee peers. Increasing minimum hour requirements not only aligns Tennessee with the rest of the country, but it also reduces red tape when massage therapists want to move and need to transfer their license—Tennessee massage therapists will encounter less difficult licensure by endorsement processes if their hour requirements are substantially equivalent or exceed those of the jurisdiction to which they are relocating.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) implemented new federal rules that could severely impact, if not decimate the massage profession. The rule, simply known as the 150% rule, impacts all educational programs that are clock-hour-based, such as massage therapy. Historically, clock hours programs had a rule for financial aid called the “150% Rule.” This allowed programs to offer more education than their state’s minimum requirements and remain eligible to offer students federal financial aid. Essentially, if a state had a minimum-hour requirement for a program, then a school could offer a program that exceeded the minimum hours by up to 50% and students would still be eligible for financial aid through Title IV. For example: If a state has a massage therapy minimum requirement of 500 hours, a school in that state could offer a massage program up to 750 hours (150% of the minimum) and remain eligible to offer federal financial aid.

As of July 1, 2024, for a massage program to remain Title IV-eligible, program length must be exactly what the state requires. Schools cannot deviate from this number, or the entire program becomes ineligible for Title IV funding. In essence, the new rule amends the 150% rule to 100%. This is a catch-22 issue for massage students and schools in Tennessee. The ED requires clock hour programs to be at least 600-hours to be federal financial aid eligible. Because of the rule change, Tennessee massage students are no longer eligible for financial aid because massage programs are

limited by Tennessee law to 500 hours. Because of this, Tennessee must increase their minimum education requirements to ensure students can access federal funds for massage education.

ABMP believes that House Bill 1610 and Senate Bill 1588 will bring Tennessee licensure requirements in line with national averages and industry-recognized standards, and we encourage adoption of these bills.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 303-458-7645 or lance@abmp.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L Hostetter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Lance Hostetter
Government Relations Director
Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals